

Dignitaries from throughout Europe, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin, observed an honor guard place wreaths at a war monument in Gdansk.

The German battleship Schleswig-Holstein began shelling Polish military positions on the Westerplatte peninsula in Gdansk before dawn on September 1, 1939, marking the beginning of World War II. By the time the war ended in 1945, more than 60 million soldiers and civilians had been killed, but no other nation suffered more than Poland, where one in six persons died.

“This has been a phenomenal journey into time and liberty,” said Congresswoman Kaptur, who is of Polish descent. “May the world remember and dedicate itself to liberty’s cause, in its full manifestation, in this new millennium.”

The United States, Kaptur said, was the indispensable actor in resolving the great human tragedy of the Second World War and turning back Nazism. “It is awe inspiring to see the potential for the new century in Europe.”

Kaptur traveled to Poland along with 95-year-old Marian Wojciechowski, who was serving in the Polish Army when the Nazis attacked. Mr. Wojciechowski, who lived in Toledo for many years before retiring to Las Vegas, spoke at various ceremonies during the week and urged the Polish people to raise the next generation of leaders.

“He is a real hero,” said Congresswoman Kaptur, “and he was recognized as such at all the ceremonies. I am honored to have been his traveling companion on this journey of a lifetime—a journey into the past with a glimpse of the future.”

The U.S. delegation at today’s official ceremonies was led by Gen. James L. Jones (ret.), who serves as National Security Adviser to President Obama. It also included Victor Ashe, U.S. Ambassador to Poland, and Elizabeth-Sherwood-Randall, special assistant to the president and senior director for Europe for the National Security Council.